



LITERATURE REVIEW: FACTORS AFFECTING EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT IN PRIVATE AND PUBLIC SECTORS

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Abstract

Employee engagement is a pertinent global issue as the percentage of engaged employees is less than the percentage of disengaged employees in the world. Therefore, the purpose of this review paper is to provide an understanding on the factors influencing employee engagement in both private and public sectors. A review of 15 journal articles published during 2017 to 2022 was performed to identify the influencing factors in both sectors and to ascertain the knowledge gaps in the literature. The findings indicate that influencing factors in private sector are focused on personal factors while the public sector has concerns on human resource and organizational aspects. The common factors for both sectors were rewards & recognition, leadership, training & development, communication, and supervisor relationship. Most of the research has applied Kahn's engagement theory and social exchange theory. The findings have also indicated the role of employee engagement as a mediator for variables of employee performance, organizational performance, productivity, job satisfaction and service delivery but there is a dearth of research on the role of employee engagement as a moderating variable.

Keywords: employee engagement, influencing factors, literature review, public sector, private sector.

Introduction

In the past three decades, several scholars have researched on the various aspects of engagement as it is critical even at present context in the world. Engaged employees in the world in 2020 is



20% which is only 2% less before the Covid 19 pandemic in 2019 (Gallup, 2021). Employee engagement is a crucial phenomenon as it is related to the performance, productivity, turnover intention and success of an organization (Moletsane, Tefera, & Migiro, 2019; Sun & Bunchapattanasakda, 2019). The relationship of engagement with the performance outcome of 276 organizations in 96 countries indicate that well-being, patient safety incidents, absenteeism, quality (defects), loyalty of clients, safety incidents and productivity have strong effect while profitability, shrinkage, turnover and organization citizenship behaviour have low correlation with employee engagement (Harter, et al., 2020). The lower level of employee engagement which hinders the organizational performance can be improved with providing basic human needs such as, relationships in the workplace, regular recognition, continuous performance discussions, personal development opportunities (Gallup,2017).

The performance of private-sector organizations is geared on profit generation while for the public-sector entities is service oriented, and hence, similarities and differences in employee behavior are evident in these two sectors (Monte, 2017). For instance, the majority of men work in the private sector offers a higher income level while majority of women prefer to work in the public sector which has a higher job security (Monte, 2017). Also, young people are working in the private entities as they wish to change jobs frequently in order to get professional experiences while the elders work in the public organizations with long tenure (Monte, 2017). Though the plethora of literature has found on different topics related to employee engagement, there is a dearth of review research on understanding the influencing factors on employee engagement in the private and public sectors. Alnuaimi (2022) has suggested to compare the influencers and similarities in the public and private sector organizations. Also, Othman et al. (2019) have pointed out the need of continuous analysis of numerous factors affecting employee engagement as it is a persistent global issue. Therefore, this article is focused to review and compare the influencing factors on employee engagement in the private and public sector entities. This article will also identify any knowledge gaps in the literature published from 2017 to 2022.

Theories/models related to employee engagement.

Several scholars have presented different aspects of engagement with different theoretical frameworks in the literature. This paper is confined to present three theories/models related to employee engagement which are explained next in this section.

Kahn's Theory of Engagement

William A. Kahn (1990) has introduced the concept of engagement as psychological conditions of meaningfulness, availability and safety. Psychological meaningfulness was described as the benefit or the return on investment that an individual gains through the work role involvement, while psychological safety was explained as the confidence on the self-image, trustworthy



situations and no threatening social environment to work, and psychological availability was elaborated as the availability of resources in performing the role of the individual. The psychological meaningfulness is influenced with the nature of the job task, role and interaction of the work. The psychological safety is affected by the work environment such as, interpersonal relationships, dynamic interactions with group and intergroups, administration style or procedures, and organizational standards. The psychological availability is influenced by the resource availability in terms of physical energy and emotional energy, level of confidence and issues outside the life. If these conditions are not satisfied the individuals withdraw from their tasks performed. Furthermore, he explained that individual engagement as connected to work and to others, the individual presence (physical, cognitive and emotion), and active role performance. On the other hand, disengagement is withdrawal from the connection and absence of physical, cognitive and emotion.

Social Exchange Theory

This theory is mostly applied in social psychology research and applied in relation to engagement as a reciprocal exchange between individuals or groups which was elaborated by Peter Blau (as cited in Cook & Rice, 2003). This theory was developed with the contribution made by four figure heads namely George Homans (1958), John Thibaut and Harold Kelley (1959) and Peter Blau (1964) (as cited in Emerson, 1976). Blau (1964) explained this exchange process as an economic exchange, which specifies the 'give and take' concept (as cited in Cook & Rice, 2003). His explanation was based on utilitarianism which originates from economics to social behaviour and further argued that someone does favour to another with an intention of future return. This theory is applied in principle of economics, sociology and psychology to explain the relationships of interpersonal, groups and organizations (Redmond, 2015). As he explained this exchange process is linked to reward (which can be financial or nonfinancial) and linked to the value of it. If the value is higher than the reward the outcome is negative while reward is higher than the cost, the outcome is positive. Likewise, the engagement and disengagement depend on the exchange of reward and cost as elaborated by the social exchange theory.

Aon Hewitt's Model of Engagement

This engagement model is comprised with six organization drivers namely, brand, leadership, performance, the work, the basics, company practices and business outcomes with three individual engagement dimensions. These three characteristics of engaged employees were identified as "Say" who talks positively about the organization, "Stay" who always think as belonging to the organization, and "Strive" who are inspired to work more to achieve the success of the organization (Aon Hewitt, 2015).



As reported by Aon Hewitt (2015), the performance of the organization is determined by the psychological state of employee such as thoughts, emotions and intentions and the behavioral outcome. The higher level of engagement has proved the higher achievement of sales targets and higher customer satisfaction as reported by the Aon Hewitt (2015). Moreover, in the manufacturing industry the higher engagement has caused for fewer quality defects.

Employee Engagement in Private Sector vs. Public Sector

The general belief is the level of engagement in the public sector is lower than the private sector. The level of engagement in the public sector is 38% while the private sector has 44% as reported by a national survey done by CPS HR institute in United States (Bakota, 2019). It is impossible to achieve higher performance without having highly engaged employees though the right people with the right skills are available at the right time (Lavigna, 2019). The engagement outcomes in the government sector are related with achieving the strategic goals, delivering customer service, retaining good personnel, encouraging innovation, improving attendance and maintaining safe workplace. Moreover, highly engaged workforce will provide better service to satisfy their customers which leads to higher trust upon the government sector's services and staff. In return, employee engagement, attraction and retention will increase (Lavigna, 2019).

The impact of engagement on the business outcomes in the industry is significant as shown below which is reported by the Gallup (2022):

- Absenteeism 81%
- Patient safety 58%
- Turnover for high turnover organizations 18%
- Turnover for low turnover organizations 43%
- Shrinkage (theft) 28%
- Accidents (safety incidents) 64%
- Defects (quality) 41%
- Customer loyalty 10%
- Productivity (sales) 18%
- Profitability 23%



However, the lifestyle of the employees as well as the organizational behavior were changed with the Covid 19 pandemic spread throughout the world. The employees had to work remotely without physically reporting to work, and for some employees they had to quit from their jobs due to business closure, technology emerged with flexible working environment at everywhere. The Gallup report has also mentioned that the level of engagement of remote workers were high,



and their stress level also has increased. The disengaged employees were leaving the jobs while 125 million fulltime job opportunities were available in United States (Gallup, 2022). In most research the influencing factors on employee engagement have categorized as individual, organizational, job related, team related and work environment (Kaaviyapriya & Xavier, 2020, Sun & Bunchapattanasakda, 2019; Van & Nafukho, 2019; Sharma, 2016).

Factors associated with engagement in the private and public sectors

The success of an organization depends on the efficiency and productivity of its employees and the worker's effort in the private sector is higher than the public sector employees (Monte, 2017). As a result, the engagement of employees will increase the job satisfaction, retain talented workers and increase the productivity (Mamari, Busaidi, Balushi, & S.Porkodi, 2019).

Identifying the influencing factors on engagement in the private sectors are important as their consequences are related to profitability, productivity, performance, commitment and turnover intention. Similarly, the engagement in service organizations in public sector has effected on the service delivery, job satisfaction and employee performance. Several factors influencing the employee engagement have been identified in empirical studies in both private and public sectors and they can be categorized as organizational and personal factors.

Organizational Factors

Work Environment

The success of the organization depends on the performance of the engaged employees. Therefore, the organization has to pay attention on the influencing factors to develop the morale of employees and increase the level of engagement. To do so, the banking sector organizations provide good working environment with no barriers between the relationship of supervisor and co-worker as well as the opportunities for employee training and development (Nagesh, Kulenur, & Shetty, 2019). In the hospitality sector, service climate is a very important organizational aspect. When the employee feels that the work environment recognizes their work, rewarded and supported them, the employee provides a quality service for the customers which has a strong relationship with employee engagement which strongly mediated turnover intention (Kang & Busser, 2018).

Leadership

Managers are encouraged to engage staff through delegating the authority and responsibility down the hierarchy. This will motivate employees to take part in decision making, solving their problems by themselves, and enhance employee engagement. Managerial leadership style has shown significant positive association with employee engagement in the construction industry in Malaysia. This leadership style increases the engagement of workers in coordinating with multi-



corporations, while a fair and equitable payment mechanism motivates the level of engagement of staff (Othman et al. 2019). During Covid 19 pandemic in 2020 has drastically affected the tourism and hospitality industry in the world and made employees disengaged due to the uncertainty of their employment. Similarly, the tourism and hotel trade in collectivism country like China have shown that significant impact of leadership empowerment and collaborations on employee engagement which has positive significant influence on employee performance (Liu, Yu, Guo, & Li, 2022).

Rewards and recognition

Fair and equitable payment mechanism motivates the level of engagement of staff which has strong power to change the attitudes of employees and has limitless impact on engagement (Othman et al., 2019). As explained in social exchange theory, compensation is exchanged with the performance of the employee. If employees are not fairly rewarded and no proper recognition mechanism of their performances, this situation will lead to employee burnout (Liu, Yu, Guo, & Li, 2022). Organizations should establish fair and equitable rewards and recognition process to enhance employee satisfaction and the feeling of positive return on investment in order to increase the level of engagement. Sana'a University is one of the public universities in Yemen, which offers poor service delivery relative to the private universities in Yemen, identified the requirements of fair rewards and recognition, and transparent promotion policy to increase the level of engagement of their employees (Altehbah, Yusr, & Salimon, 2019).

Communication

Communication is one of the key factors that leads the engagement of the staff as it is required to provide information about the organizational objectives, activities and changes happening in the organization. As a result, the employees will engage in work efficiently with maximum usage of time, resources and funds (Altehbah, Yusr, & Salimon, 2019). Moreover, an effective communication system will increase the level of engagement of the staff. Moletsane, Tefera, and Migiro (2019) found that communication has a positive relationship with engagement of staff in a sugar factory in South-Africa.

Image of the organization

This is an important characteristic that induces the inner feeling of an employee about the values, safety and stability of an organization and will lead to engagement and connect the employee to the organization (Dhir & Shukla, 2019). The management in HDFC bank in India has identified that image of the organization has a positive relationship with employee engagement (Nagesh, Kulenur, & Shetty, 2019). How employees are perceiving their organization, its products and services are critical in lean manufacturing organizations (Weerasooriya & Alwis, 2017).



Human Resource Practices

Management has to pay attention to the Human Resource practices as they improve the job satisfaction of employees and in return increase the level of engagement as explained in Social Exchange Theory (Pradhan, Dash, & Jena, 2019). These practices include the provision of training to enhance employee capabilities, providing more career opportunities, ensuring job security and getting employees involved in the decision making process make employee happy, energetic and enthusiastic in performing the job. These HR practices have significant positive associations with employee engagement in public-sector entities in India and employee engagement acted as a mediator between human resource practices and job satisfaction (Pradhan, Dash, & Jena, 2019).

Perceived Organizational Support (POS) and Perceived Supervisor Support (PSS)

POS and PSS are the beliefs of employees on the assistance that they receive from the organization and the extent of organizational caring of employee well-being which influences employee engagement (Burns, 2016). POS is a broad characteristic in an organization as it links to financial and non-financial rewards, recognition, promotions, compensation, work environment, job conditions, training, resources, procedural justice, policies, etc.

PSS is the employee belief on the support extended by the supervisor with regard to value of employee contribution, respect and caring of the employee well-being (Burns, 2016). Both POS and PSS have positive significant influences on employee engagement of lecturers attached to both state and private sector universities in Indonesia (Margaretha, Widiastuti, Zaniarti, & Wijaya, 2018).

Organizational Culture

Culture of the organization, which is a collection of values, beliefs, assumptions, behaviours which are unique to the institution, is one of the key driving forces of engagement (Pepra-Mensah & Kyeremeh, 2018; Othman et al., 2019). If the organizational culture provides a good working environment, employee feels psychologically safe which will lead to employee engagement (Shehri, McLaughlin, Al-Ashaab, & Rashid, 2017). Othman et al. (2019) also found that organizational culture has a significant impact on employee engagement.

Personal Factors

Personal Feelings

Individual feelings have significant impact on employee engagement as they feel that they are part of the organization (Moletsane, Tefera, & Migiro, 2019). Moreover, the employee's personal feeling about the organization will increase if the organization praises and recognizes the employee's work, listens and responds to the worker, provides the needs of the employee,



and allows the employee to contribute in the decision making process. Moletsane et al. (2019) also found a positive relationship between engagement and the productivity and employee engagement influenced commitment and turnover intention of employees. The feelings of an employee influence the level of engagement as explained by Kahn (1990) in relation to psychological state of mind (as cited in Anitha, 2014).

Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy is one's belief on his own abilities in performing assigned tasks well (Arifin, et al., 2021) and it has been identified as an individual resource in Job-Demand Resource theory (Albrecht & Marty, 2017). Similarly, Kahn (1990) has explained self-efficacy as the level of confidence on one's ability to cope up with the work. According to Bandura (1977), people avoid threatening situations if they do not believe with their coping skills while, on the other hand, they will involve with the work and behave confidently if they believe with their capabilities on managing situations. Self-efficacy has positive significant impact on engagement (Albrecht & Marty, 2017) while engagement positively mediated the self-efficacy and performance (Chhajer, Rose, & Joseph, 2018).

Distributive justice and procedural justice

This concept was explained by Blau (1964) based on the Homan's rule of distributive justice that reward is an expected proportion to the investment cost. Moreover, people compare the rewards they receive with others. If they do not receive a fair rate of return in this social exchange process as expected, they will be disappointed. The rule of justice is a social acceptance that people must receive a fair return on the service rendered and cost of investment should be proportionate with the rewards which will enhance the employee engagement.

Procedural justice involves employee perception of fair and transparent policies and procedures in decision making process for distribution of resources and benefits which will increase employee engagement (as cited in Liu, Yu, Guo, & Li (2022).

Work-life Balance (WLB)

WLB is the psychological, emotional and cognitive state of an employee which needs to maintain balance between work and personal life (Jaharuddin & Zainol, 2019). If WLB is maintained well with the support of the organization, it will increase the level of engagement and employee performance. But poor WLB will cause stress and lead to employee turnover intention (Jaharuddin & Zainol, 2019). WLB is considered as a significant aspect in engagement which organization has to avoid employee stress by providing an adaptable work environment (NGUYEN & PHAM, 2020).



The analysis of influencing factors on employee engagement in both private and public sector extracted from the reviewed journal articles explained above, is summarised in the Table 1 below.

Table 1: The analysis of results of the reviewed articles

Author and year	Research instrument	Theory	Sector and Industry	Factors	Results
Liu, X., Yu, J., Guo, Q., & Li, J. 2022	Questionnaire	Social Exchange Theory	Private Hospitality in China	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership empowerment • Collaborations • Rewards & recognition • Distributive justice • Procedural justice • Engagement (mediator) 	All factors have positive significant impact on employee engagement which has significant relationship with employee performance
Alnuaimi, Y. M. 2022	Questionnaire	N/A	Public sector in UAE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workplace conditions • Workplace experience 	Workplace conditions have positive significance relationship with employee engagement and experience has not significant impact on engagement
NGUYEN, L. G., & PHAM, H. T. 2020	Questionnaire	Kahn's theory JD-R theory	Public Not For Profit Organizations (NFPOs) in Vietnam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership • Work-design • Learning & development • Recognition • Work-life balance 	Work-design and work-life balance have significant impact on engagement while other three factors have not significant impact
Nagesh, P., Kulenur, S., & Shetty, P 2019	Questionnaire	N/A	Private HDFC Bank In India	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working environment • Training & development • Image of the 	Except decision making all other factors have positive significance



				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> organization Supervisor and co-worker relationship Decision making 	relationship with employee engagement
Moletsane, M., Tefera, O., & Migiro, S. 2019	Questionnaire	N/A	Private Sugar industry in South Africa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> individual feelings work environment commitment leadership style communication engagement (mediator) 	All five factors have positive relationship with engagement which has positive relationship with performance
Othman, R. B., Rapi, R. B., Alias, N. E., Jahya, A. B., & Loon, K. W. 2019	Questionnaire	N/A	Private Construction industry in Malaysia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leadership Compensation Organizational culture 	All factors indicated significant positive relationship with engagement
Pradhan, R. K., Dash, S., & Jena, L. K. 2019	Questionnaire	Social Exchange Theory	Public sector in India	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Human resource practices Employee engagement (mediator) 	Human resource practices have significant positive relationship with engagement while it is fully mediated the human resource practices and job satisfaction
Altehrebah, S. S., Yusr, M. M., & Salimon, M. G. 2019	Questionnaire	N/A	Public University in Yemen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employee communication Rewards & recognition Employee development 	All factors have significant positive relationship
Wushe, T., & Shenje, J.	Questionnaire	Social Exchange	Public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Effective leadership 	All four factors have significant



2019		Theory	Government departments in Harare, Zimbabwe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training & career development • Compensation & incentive programs • Organizational policies & procedures • Employee engagement (mediator) 	positive relationship with engagement which has positive association with service delivery
Dahkoul, Z.M. 2018	Questionnaire	N/A	Private Manufacturing industry in Jordan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employee satisfaction • Management standards • Training • Employee engagement (mediator) 	All three factors have positive significant impact on engagement which has significant influence on performance
Kang, H. J. A., & Busser, J. A. 2018	Questionnaire	Social Exchange Theory	Hospitality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service climate • Psychological capital • Engagement • Turnover intention • Organizational hierarchy 	Strong relationship of predictors on engagement and strong mediation effect of engagement on turnover intention and strong moderation effect of organizational hierarchy
Margaretha, M., Widiastuti, R., Zaniarti, S., & Wijaya, H. 2018	Questionnaire	Kahn's engagement theory	Public and private State and private universities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job characteristics • Rewards & recognition • Perceived organizational support • Perceived supervisor support 	All predictors are significantly influenced the engagement
Albrecht, S. L., & Marty, A.	Questionnaire	N/A	Public Education,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social boldness • Diligence • Sentimentality 	Social boldness, diligence and sentimentality



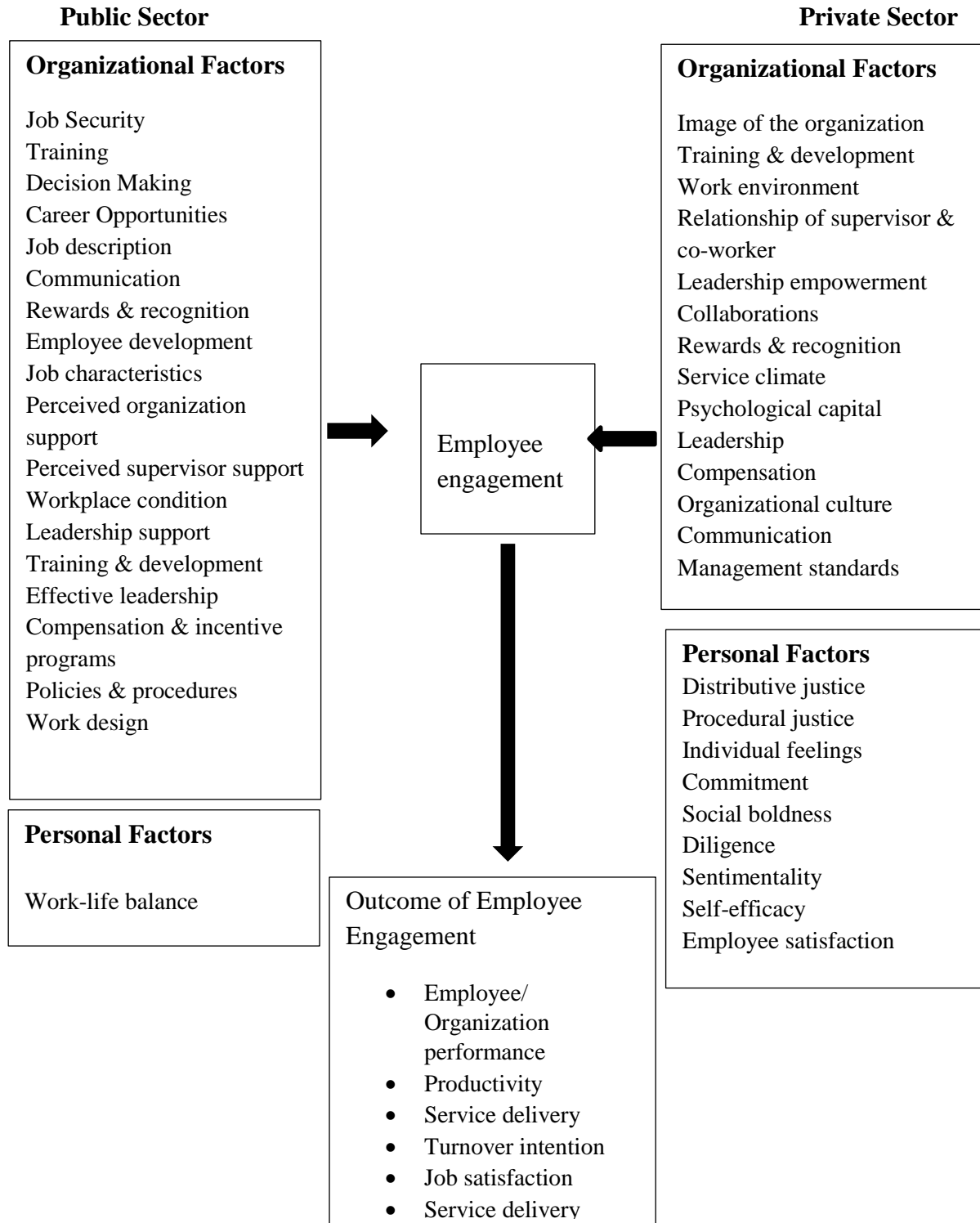
2017			health care, Professional, scientific and technical service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liveliness • Self-efficacy (mediator) 	have positive significant impact on engagement through self-efficacy
Raza, S., Ansari, N. u., Humayon, D. A., Hussain, M. S., & Aziz, K. 2017	Questionnaire	Kahn's engagement theory Social Exchange theory	Public Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rewards and recognition • Leadership support • Training and development 	All factors have significant positive relationship
Weerasooriya, N., & Alwis, A. C. 2017	Questionnaire	N/A	Private Lean Manufacturing industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employee communication • Employee development • Co-employee support • Image of the organization • Rewards & recognition • Leadership 	Co-employee support and Rewards & recognition have no significant impact on engagement and other four factors have significant impact on engagement

N/A - not available

Conclusion

This paper has reviewed the literature on employee engagement, related theories and identifying the influencing factors of employee engagement in both public and private sector. The results of this review have shown that many empirical studies have focused more on identifying organizational factors than the individual factors. The influencing factors on employee engagement in the public sector have focused on human resource practices and organizational factors while the private sector has concentrated more on personal factors. As shown in Table 1, most empirical research has applied Kahn's Engagement Theory and Social Exchange Theory. However, both sectors in common have considered rewards and recognition, training and development, leadership, communication, and relationship of supervisor. The reputation of the organization, individual characteristics, culture of the organization are less researched areas in the public sector. In many studies, engagement has acted as a mediator and affected to several outcomes in the organization as shown in Figure 1. The factors which have significantly influenced on employee engagement in the private and public sectors and the outcomes of the employee engagement is also shown in Figure 1

Figure 1: Summary of the Influencing factors in private and public sectors and outcome



Source: Author



Most of the research related to influencing factors on employee engagement has been based on Kahn's engagement theory and Social Exchange theory. Therefore, future research should explore on other theories such as JD-R model, Aon Hewitt model etc. As been highlighted earlier, there is a dearth of research on personality traits, reputation of the organization, culture of the institute, psychological aspects etc. in the public sector which need to be investigated for future research. In addition, this paper has discovered that employee engagement is a strong mediator to several organizational outcomes such as performance, turnover intention, productivity, job satisfaction, and service quality. Therefore, it is important to understand the impact of other influencing factors on employee engagement in both sectors. Also, it is proposed to further investigate on the moderating effect of employee engagement in future research. This review paper has discovered that little attention has been given on the impact of demographic factors of employees.

With the outbreak of Covid 19 in the world, the work style of employees has changed from physical office environment to online, remote and flexible working environment. Accordingly, the attention of the management is especially required on the influencing factors on engagement. The Quantum Workplace report on "The Impact of Covid-19 on Employee Engagement" has mentioned that employee communication and leadership, pay and benefits offered to employees, health, well-being and work-life balance were important factors to consider on employee engagement. Furthermore, recent research has emphasized the significance of involvement of employees in the HRD strategy of the organization, aligned engagement activities suit to individuals, and increased freedom of individuals and accountability in their engagement (Pass & Ridgway, 2022). Accordingly, it is important for further research on individual factors, characteristics, behavior, the impact of demographic factors and HR-related factors on employee engagement to cope up with challenges emerged after pandemic in addition to focusing the research gaps explained in this article.



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